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Conversation

[Frontispiece, facing p. iii]

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605 a wide circle of kin. It is entirely consistent with these needs
612 that the collateral extension of the kindred is wider in a person's own generation than in either the first ascendant or descendant generations. As the children of a family approach adult status, a father through the identification of his interests with those of his children, is drawn less into the affairs of his own cousins and becomes more concerned with the cousins of his children's kindred, who from his point of view include affinal relatives as well as the children of his own siblings and first cousins.

605 The essence of cousinhood, as indeed of all collateral kinship, is that measure of confidence and altruism to which we have referred more than once. Cousins are the children or grandchilden of siblings and the values of cousinship contain the ideal that their affections are like those of brothers and sisters. Cousins are genuinely concerned about each others' successes
605 or misfortunes, hopes and fears. When a man meets a cousin
521 after a long interval of time there is obvious pleasure on both
576 sides. They find a quiet corner away from other people and a conversation begins which, if circumstances allow, may continue for many hours. There is a certain conventional sequence of topics. At first there are detailed inquiries about the health of each member of the two families. This is followed by an exchange of information about sheep and grazing, marriages and match-making in either family or amongst their kinsmen. Afterwards the talk ranges in random fashion over many subjects, the local personalities and gossip of their villages, the latest oppressive measure of government bureaucrats. What is so striking about the private talk of kinsmen is its fluency, freedom, and its mellow modulated tones. It presents a striking contrast with the talk of unrelated Sarakatsani in the forum of the village square or coffee-shop. There, conversation is a contest of wits, cast in a compulsively restrained monosyllabic form, yet accompanied with the striking of assertive attitudes. It is not intended as a means for exchanging information but rather as a form of protagonistic competition.

605 There are certain kinds of general social intercourse which
836 are possible only between kinsmen, more especially between cousins. For the Sarakatsani, marriage and sexual relations can-
[684] not be separated. A girl who loses her honour is in danger of her
000 life at the hands of her own family. The importance of virginity

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and cares for her children. Her role is expressive in that she is a symbol of the mutual love and acceptance which bind the different members of the family to one another. The shepherd husband is often away from his home for days and nights, and if the weather is bad he spends much of this time soaked to the skin and shivering. In these depressing conditions he thinks and talks about little else than dry clothes, hot food, and the fire he will sit by when he returns to his hut. The hearth with its fire situated in the centre of the circular hut and tended by the wife or mother is, in fact and in symbol, the centre of Sarakatsan family life; it gives physical warmth and protection against the spiritual forces of evil. The husband is dependent on his wife for the simple but to him very important attentions which he associates with its light and warmth. In return he seldom interferes in what concerns the work and duties of his wife. In a contingent sense, she is independent in her own sphere of action.

But, ultimately, the authority of the husband over the wife is absolute. A wife must show respect (σεβασμός) to her husband before strangers at all times. If they have to walk together in the village or the town, the wife follows some two or three yards behind him. When visitors are entertained in her hut, the wife never sits and eats with her husband and the guests, but stands erect and motionless ready to attend to the needs of the squatting men. Even in the extended family household husband and wife do not eat together. The men eat first, the women of the household afterwards. No portion of a cooked dish (προσφάτ) is set aside for the women, who must satisfy themselves with whatever is left by the men; this is often very little. The act of eating together implies sharing equally in what is placed upon the one common dish from which the Sarakatsani customarily eat. It indicates in that particular context, a certain equality between those who partake. Only sometimes in the intimacy of the elementary family may the husband, wife, and children sit and eat together. For in this most private situation, the relationship of mutual identification between the members of the elementary family makes them, for that moment, equals in the communion of their common meal.

Indeed, there is a marked difference between the public and private behaviour of a man and his wife towards each other.

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strength of both flocks would rapidly be reduced to vanishing point. The evidence suggests that small-scale theft was not generally found among those families using the grazing lands of the same village, but was concentrated on the flocks within the territory of immediately neighbouring villages, that is to say in an area some 5–10 miles distant from the homesteads of the thieves. But at this distance an expedition became a planned undertaking requiring the absence of shepherds for perhaps two days and nights from their own sheep, a circumstance which significantly limited the frequency of these raids. It is extremely difficult to assess what was the frequency, but it seems unlikely that the average family enjoyed this sport more often than four or five times in a summer.

The Sarakatsani justify animal theft on the grounds that before 1937 a man could not provide his family with enough food without stolen meat. It was, therefore, an honourable undertaking. Moreover, since other men stole your animals, both interest and honour demanded retaliation. The older men are lyrical about the satisfaction of eating a stolen sheep by moonlight. A man only kills his own animals for meat at important social and religious celebrations, and then with reluctance. The stolen sheep was a luxury, a luxury at the enemy's expense.

After these expeditions, a shepherd was torn between the precaution of secrecy and the desire to win renown for the daring and cleverness of his exploits. He would openly boast about the number of sheep he had recently lifted, but would not generally reveal their original owner. The latter, however, on his own account or through the reports of kinsmen, formed certain shrewd suspicions. In any event, whether he suspected the identity of the thief or not, he had to take some retaliatory action on somebody since otherwise he would not only become a laughing-stock, but a prey to other thieves sensing an easy victim. The best defence against theft was swift retaliation with interest. Even where a man was sure of the thief's identity, his retaliation against the flock of the stani of which the thief was a member might not fall on a sheep or sheep which belonged to the original thief. Therefore, in either instance, an original act of sheep theft might lead to a series of thefts not necessarily confined to the original participants.

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the group from without which drives it to reciprocal action. There is no missing the intense satisfaction expressed by shepherds after a successful night's grazing on another's grass. Such acts define the exclusiveness and prepotency of a family group against other family groups and the world in general.

Under present-day conditions the distinction between different ways of showing enmity towards immediate neighbours and more distantly situated families is not so immediately clear, but nevertheless exists. In its relations with another family group using the grazing land of the same village, a family maintains a measure of restraint it would not be concerned to show in chance encounters with families which live at a distance. We have shown how a grass thief is careful never to stray too far across the boundary of his neighbour. He does not boast about these exploits, and if accused would deny that he was aware he had crossed the line. Similarly, the victim, unless he accidentally comes upon the thief red-handed, is unlikely to make wild or insulting accusations which transform an affair of limited hostility into a 'question of honour'. A man whose grass is being raided merely retaliates upon the thief, if he is not already doing so.

But a family has hostile relations of grass-stealing with only its immediate grazing neighbours. And since the summer pastures are reallotted each year a man is unlikely to have the same neighbours two years in succession. Therefore, over the years these hostilities are diffused, as it were, throughout the local gathering of families. In general, shepherds who must live in or close to the same village express hostility in their attitudes rather than in their actions. An almost aggressive secrecy, the cloistered care of unmarried girls, the pleasure taken in the misfortunes of others and the fear of the evil eye, the slanderous vilification of all unrelated people and their motives, are indicative of these attitudes. On the other hand, people are punctilious in their formal greetings when they meet. Women exchange careful and guarded conversation at the well, probing for information and avoiding the need to give it; but with civility. And their men drink in the coffee-shop and play cards with self-assertion but apparent *bonhomie*—yet always on guard for a possible slight, and always with a mental picture of who is for them, and who against, in the immediate vicinity.

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are rigidly segregated, and the categorical opposition is evident. For in this context women are always a potential threat to the honour of men whether the latter are kinsmen or strangers. Thus unrelated persons of opposite sex seldom speak except to exchange a curt and conventional 'good day' if they meet on a narrow path. Although a man calls out a greeting to an unmarried girl, she keeps her eyes on the ground and never replies. At weddings unrelated persons of opposite sex, even though they are members of the same kindred of the bride or the groom, may not speak to one another. On these occasions the two sexes hold their feasting and dancing separately. In recent years at village festivals unrelated Sarakatsani of both sexes sometimes dance in the same ring but a woman is always flanked on both sides by men to whom she is related.

Within the group of related families which co-operate in the management of sheep, there are occasions when this opposition is expressed in accepted attitudes of sexual solidarity. If a number of women are working together on a common task such as the building of a hut, a group of men with nothing better to occupy their time will stand about smoking while they freely criticize their women's craftsmanship, and even revile them for their more general faults of ugliness and cunning. From time to time one of the more senior women will attempt some reply. 'Men', she calls out, 'are lazy good-for-nothings who do nothing but talk.' These exchanges begin in tones of banter but sometimes, in the later stages, they find sharp edges. In family life a favourite topic of evening conversation is a debate on the relative contributions and sacrifices which are made by the men and the women of the family for its well-being and security. This kind of talk is good-humoured but serves to draw out and emphasize what is expected of male and female roles.

Women face a hard and merciless routine of work and suffering. *Camaraderie* and the consciousness of a common fate help them to face it. This aspect of the solidarity of women is often expressed in the frequent discussion among those related by kinship or marriage of their common subjection to men in sexual activity. There is a great deal of bawdy reference to the male sex organs, and women constantly speak of their dislike of sexual intercourse and the absence of physical pleasure they find in it.

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find in it. A bride, during the last days before her wedding, is kept company by those unmarried kinswomen who live close at hand. They help her in the last feverish preparations of her dowry. The girls sympathize with the bride, but say that they will never leave their homes to submit themselves to a strange man. The bride applauds their decision, and says that she will secrete a knife upon her person and that when the bridegroom comes to her she will castrate him.

Unrelated men, when they are gathered together, criticize women in a general way. Wives, it is often said contemptuously, need two things, copulation and beating. But men are not given to obscenity except in oaths, and they do not discuss the intimacies of sexual relations, since these concern their manliness in a very literal sense; moreover, any discussion of a woman's sexual qualities diminishes her honour.

The opposition of the two sexes is also reflected in a pattern of sex-linked attributes which are antithetical but complementary. Men are courageous, austere, possess manliness and pride, but lack patience. Women are fearful, lacking in resolution but have greater depths of love; they are sensitive to shame, modest and patient. However, the masculine values transcend this opposition and provide the ideal virtues of the total community. Men must never in any circumstances be too modest or sensitive to shame. But when their family is threatened with violence and outrage, even women will find a pride and courage of heroic quality, and for this they will be honoured.

If the female sex is opposed to the male sex, it is also inferior. The Sarakatsani believe that man is a being created by God for the highest and the noblest purposes. Since the Fall there has been a legacy of sin in his constitution yet all in all he remains noble. The flaws in the human condition are envy and sexuality, for these are the thoughts and desires that particularly have the power to turn men's thoughts away from God and from the struggle to draw closer to Him. Manliness has a physiological basis but it only becomes a true manliness when it is disciplined and spiritualized. Sexual intercourse, then, is not an unmixed good. It is something which is 'unseemly' or 'out of alignment' (ἀνάποδο). In some way it pollutes (μαγαρίζει). After sleeping with his wife a shepherd ought to wash his hands before milking sheep. A ewe is a 'sacred thing' (ιερὸ

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156 The heads of families whenever they are free from shepherding
599 duties gather in the village square or the coffee-shop. On this
571 public stage the chief representatives of the families of part of
517 the total community appear, and by their attitude and bearing
885 and the recognition and response they accord to one another they confirm or deny the ideal equality of one family with another. This equality is only maintained by a constant effort of self-assertion. A family head must strut about as if his affairs are of the greatest consequence. His expression is expected to be severe and proud. Modesty in these circumstances is no virtue but a sign of weakness. Ideally, the claims and assertions of other men must be at least equalled, and preferably surpassed. Yet care must be taken not to make a boast which can be proved to be empty. The boaster whose bluff has been called
[521] is despised. Conversation has a sharp, monosyllabic, contrapuntal quality. It is concerned with self-assertion, not with communication or the exchange of information. On these occasions a man must on no account sit quietly in a corner
[525] unspeaking (ἀμίλητος). To withdraw is to admit defeat. Card games often supplement the drinking and the conversation. Although they are games of chance rather than skill, they are acted out with great seriousness. As each man plays his card, this is struck down on to the table with the full force of his open
[578] hand. Quarrels are frequent if one man wins too handsomely and makes facetious or boasting remarks to the losers.

Yet a man ought to combine with this competitive behaviour a generally sociable attitude. The essence of being one of a company (παρέα) is equal sharing. Each man in his turn is expected to buy a round of drinks for the others. Any hint of meanness is enough to brand a man as tight-fisted (σφιχτός), a very serious charge. On the other hand, the man who moves to the other extreme, who spends lavishly and indiscriminately on entertaining others, or gambles recklessly at cards, is also condemned. Such people are known as wasteful spenders (σπάταλοι), without any sense of responsibility towards their families.

885 Caution, moderation, and self-restraint are the qualities
156 demanded of the family head if he is to be a successful steward
599 of his dependants' interests. We have already seen that in questions of honour the head of the family is unable to hazard himself as freely as his unmarried brother. For similar reasons

Sikaryia Village

585 The Sarakatsánissas, usually so silent in the
521 presence of men, look forward to weddings as
831 their only chances of fun. The talk takes a turn
[362] of hair-raising bawdiness. None of the exciting, comic, or absurd aspects of sex are left unexploited. Rhymes, anecdotes, and reminiscences are eagerly repeated and capped, crone mumbles toothlessly to crone, bantering wives make humorously boastful and teasing comparisons about their married lives, girls listen wide-eyed and agog.
[152] Fits of laughter punctuate this scandalous chat, hands are flung in the air in hilarity, faces are covered in mock shame. All this goes on out of male earshot, while at a distance their husbands and fathers and descendants smile indulgently at this seasonable ribaldry.

585 NIGHTFALL had transformed the scene indoors.
123 Late arrivals and a few indefatigable ones were
[354] still at meat; but the rest, lit now by scattered oil dips, had lapsed into a semitrance of wine and song. Our return with Uncle Petro evoked hospitable cries of greeting and invitation, repeated many times and driven home by a clashing of wine tumblers, to stay the night, as it was so late; or for a week, a month, or a year, or forever, to forget London and take to the huts. Alas, some tiresome fixture in Alexandroupolis next morning compelled us to leave, so, after manifold farewells, we climbed the stairs to pay our respects to the bride in her hushed upper chamber.

The rushlight on a stool cast so dim a light that the group at the end was hard to discern. One of the seated bridesmaids, mown down by her vigil, was fast asleep where she sat; a nudge from her neighbor shook her blinking into line. None of the other tiring women had moved, and the bride had remained frozen for the hours since we had last seen her in the same posture of submission. The faint radiance seemed to have robbed them all of a dimension. Darkly haloed by their own interlocking shadows, they merged with the wall, their black and white figures assuming the aspect of a half-lit fresco, with here and there an earring, a coin, a bracelet, a ring, or a necklace glittering momentarily and dimming again, as the wick rose or fell, like fragments of gilt or isolated gold tesserae in a mosaic. The bride silently bowed in answer to our farewells, miraculously moving among her still hagiographic troop of virgins and martyrs. We tiptoed out.

"Doesn't she ever speak?" I asked Uncle Petro when we were out of doors.

"Not now," he said.

"It's rather sad, during her own wedding."

"Ah! That's the way it is. That's how it should be."

[p. 81-B]

/181 cont./

474 571 461 521 Because they remain in the camp, the women profit more than the men from the intensity of social relations within the Tséligato. In summer, if one is out walking, one can see them all together spinning while gossiping and watching the children, the young girls for their part mounting the warp or weaving while exchanging confidences and jokes or singing sublimely lyrical songs.

(887) In a corner, the old men, very dignified, smoke their pipes and criticize everybody.

(533) The distant sound of bells or shepherd flutes adds to this atmosphere, which evokes an idyll of Theocritus or a page from Hesiod.

474 132 233 But in winter the colors are less soft. When the north winds sting cruelly and snow or storms make the night diabolical, men and women must protect the flocks, above all the newborn lambs, the hope of the future, by running from one sheepfold to another, from one gorge to another, in a desperate contest with unleashed nature. It is at such moments that the Tséligato completely proves its effectiveness as a form of /182/ solidarity and collective action, and in particular as the only framework open to those who are isolated.

* * * *

474 596 The elements of the Tséligato are arranged hierarchically. At the head one finds the Tséligas and his family. Then the associated families and the isolated shepherds, on an equal footing. This is true from a contractual point of view; in actuality the families are hierarchically arranged according to their size in work force and flocks, the isolated shepherds occupying a subordinate place.

Of course, the principle of seniority and of division by sex plays the same role here as in the other social units, the hierarchy of individuals outside their respective families being rigorously prescribed at the Tséligato level.

(675) For its part, the process of obligation-compensation seen in the